

SOME WILD MEN OF BORNEO

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The expression "wild man of Borneo" is known to every child where the English language is spoken. The origin of the expression is unknown. It may possibly refer to the "orang-outang", one of the large apes, which lives in the jungles of Borneo. However, it is one of the mildest of apes and makes a docile pet. It reaches a height of three and a half feet. It is called "mias" by the natives. The Malay words "orang-hutan" mean "man of the jungle," and doubtless the white man's name for this ape is a corruption of these Malay words.

About a century ago the coasts of Borneo, Northern Borneo especially, were infested by pirates, Dyaks, who sallied forth in great canoes holding 30 to 40 men, which swooped down on passing trading scows, murdering and robbing their owners and occupants. Perhaps these pirates were the original "wild men of Borneo".

The pirates along the northern coast have been converted to other activities by the two Brooke's, successive Rajas of Sarawak, the third of this line having charge of that country now. The authority of these rajas has been gradually extended along the coast and to some extent inland. But the farther one goes from the coast inland the more tenuous does the white man's authority become, and the native follows more and more the natural habits of primitive man. To him might is right, and power to take is all the excuse needed by him for the acquisition of anything he wants, including in many cases human heads. The spread of the white man's authority may be said to have driven head-hunting habits farther and farther back from the coast, and they would be eradicated completely if the population were dense enough to furnish a continuous system of communications. The isolation and occasional occurrence of the communities of the interior make for a continuance of the primitive conditions with which head-hunting is associated.

Borneo, one of the large islands of the tropics, 800 miles in maximum length from northeast to southwest and 600 miles in maximum width, is subject to the heavy

tropical rains of the equatorial belt, and is covered with dense jungle from the tops of the mountains to the coast, except where a few people have cleared the jungle along the banks of the large streams or along the fringe of the coast.

The larger part of the island is a colony of Holland. The northeastern part is owned and governed by the British North Borneo Company, Sarawak is owned and governed by Raja Brooke, the small island of Labuan off the north coast is a British Crown Colony, and Brunei, near the mouth of the Limbang river on the northern coast, is governed by the native sultan of Brunei who enjoys British protection.

The population of Borneo, in contrast to that of Java, is very small, and is chiefly congregated as a thin fringe around or near the coasts. These people include Malays, Kadayans (a group of Malays), Chinese, Dyaks and a handful of whites.

Apart from the whites the Chinese include, in addition to the coolie class, the highest representation of civilization in the island. Some of them are highly educated and have charge of a good part of the commerce of the island, which involves the collection and sale of the natural and agricultural products of the island and the importation of foreign goods, chiefly cottons, in exchange. Their activities also include the ownership and operation of steamship lines.

The Malays, being Mohammedans, also possess a marked civilization. The more highly respected among them are the older men who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca and so earned the title of "haji". The savings of a life-time are needed for such a trip, so the "haji" as a rule gains only the respect of his fellows, plus the spiritual progress which comes from the completion of the requirements of one's faith. The Malays live in villages on stilts which are called "campongs". They are generally built close to a stream so that the canoe can be tied to the front door-post and the refuse from the house may fall into the river and be carried away by it.

The Malays are traders in a smaller way than the Chinese and move by canoe, carrying their wares about

from village to village. They also follow agriculture, growing their needed supplies of rice, and also carry on fishing to a considerable extent, this supplying the other important part of their diet. To them the pig is unclean and other meat is rarely consumed except on festal occasions. There are craftsmen of many arts among the Malays, some of them being quite skilled. Large plantations and occasional mines are not numerous and are controlled by whites or the Chinese merchants. The labor is performed by Malays or Chinese.

The Dyaks are the older aborigines of the island and are divisible into many different groups or tribes, often using separate languages or dialects. The dialects of related tribes in distinct river valleys are often sufficiently different to make inter-communication incomplete.

The Dyaks are a lighter brown color than the Malays and they speak a language which is quite different from Malay. Five feet five inches is the average height of the full grown male. They are often strikingly handsome and as a rule show a superb muscular development. Those who know the Dyaks often refer to them as "nature's gentlemen". They live on rice and the product of the chase—wild deer, pig and smaller animals and birds. Hunting is done in part with a muzzle-loading musket, which is discharged only at very close quarters, when the outcome is a certainty, and in part by many ingenious traps. Some of the tribes which have had least contact with civilization still use the blow-pipe and poisoned darts in hunting small birds and animals. The blow-pipe is a tube 6 to 7 feet long, and the dart is blown suddenly from it and carries its silent and rapid death to a distance of 150 feet. The pig is not unclean to the Dyaks, who use it for food. Jungle products, resin, wild rubber and so forth, are sought by the Malays and Dyaks. The latter are more at home in this work than the former, though Malays thoroughly habituated to the jungle life are excellent men for the work.

Travel in the island is chiefly by means of canoes on the rivers, which are the main highways. The mouths of the large rivers are visited from time to time by steam

or gasoline launches of shallow enough draft to pass over the bar which blocks the channel of each stream some miles off the coast. The lower parts of the streams run through swamps of mangroves and nipa palms. The latter tree provides a hundred and one things to the thrifty native. Cocoanut groves are common along the shores and river banks near to the villages. Some cocoanut trees growing in the interior of the island by way of experiment do not bear fruit.

The campongs of the Malays are separated from each other, and as one passes inland from the coast the campongs become farther apart and are occupied by Dyaks or others of the aboriginee tribes. Around the campongs are clearings which are used for growing rice. The method adopted in rice growing is uniform with that followed in other countries. Where the rice fields are flat the desired amount of the rainfall is retained by means of small walls of mud a foot or so in height. The water is run off by knocking openings in these walls. In the case of hilly ground the more industrious may construct terraces with the object of retaining water.

In the north-eastern part of Sarawak, visited by the writer, the Malay coastal fringe is followed by the Murut tribe which is regarded as distinct from the Dyaks in language and in some customs. The population is here so thin that the same land is only used for 4 to 6 years and then a move is made to some other place a short distance away. So terracing is not practised under these conditions. The jungle is cut and the trees burned after drying a few days. The thicker branches and trunks remain unburned and are left to cumber the ground. The Muruts then sow the rice in the following manner. A man takes a long shaft of hardwood with a blunt conical point at each end, and with this punches holes 1 inch to 2 inches in depth in the loose burnt soil. His wife follows behind and drops a few grains of rice into each hole. The farm receives no more attention until the rice heads out, from which time on it is constantly attacked by large flocks of small birds, called "pipit" by the natives. All members of the household spend the day from before sun-up until after sun-down in small huts on stilts scattered through the hilly farm. From these in many

directions run strings which carry various devices for rattling or frightening the birds by means of sudden flashes of reflected sunlight. Added to these are constant monotonous shouts from the throats of the Muruts which all help to save the crop for human food. When ripe the rice is gathered by the men who strip the grain by hand from the straw which is left standing, putting the grain into a huge plaited grass basket carried on the backs of their wives. The only other grain grown by the Muruts is maize—the variety known as field corn. The kitchen garden, or the rice field near the house often has a few cucumber vines.

The Muruts also live in houses built above ground, the floor being usually about six feet above ground. In some places the space beneath the house is enclosed by a bamboo fence and serves as a pig-sty. All refuse from the house above drops through the flooring of bamboo with its many apertures. Near the coast the Murut families live in separate houses, but in passing to the interior danger from enemies becomes greater because the location is farther removed from the reach of the white rulers, and the families of one village unite in building one large community house. Each family constructs its own portion of the roof and so the number of families in such a house may be counted by the number of divisions in the roof. As many as twenty-eight families have been found living under one roof. The long house is divided into two equal portions by a partition running vertically down the center. On one side is an open corridor which is used by all, and the other side is broken into rooms by a number of walls, each room being occupied by a family.

The clothing of the Muruts is scanty and their habits not cleanly. Many of them suffer from a skin disease which covers the whole body, causing the skin to peel off. This infection, called by them "korap", starting from a centre grows outward until the whole body is covered. It is infectious by contact. Contrary to what might be expected of such a people, the morals are distinctly high.

Many of the customs are peculiar. The marriage ceremony is somewhat simple. The prospective bridegroom has already made successive visits to the house

of the bride and has become fully acquainted with the family and has been accepted as the future husband of the daughter. The bridegroom cuts a large supply of firewood sufficient for about three weeks domestic use by the parents of the bride. This he piles up outside the door of the bride's father and so becomes a member of the family and takes up his abode with the bride's parents.

The lives of these jungle natives are controlled to a marked extent by superstition and fear. The various superstitions or fears are connected with a number of individual spirits whose pleasures or displeasures are shown in various ways, but especially by the movement of certain small birds which are constantly to be met in the jungle. When going on excursions to the jungle for hunting or for produce of the jungle the small birds must fly across the path in a set manner, first from one side and then the other before the omen is regarded as good and the journey can be safely undertaken. If the bird gets the signals crossed the omen is a bad one and the journey stops, a camp is made and another trial is made the next day. The Muruts have been seen in the same camp for ten days awaiting the propitious signal for a successful trip.

Deaths are occasions for visits between neighboring villages, the people going en masse from one village to the other. Rice spirit (arack) is consumed on these occasions, and under the influence of liquor brawls may be started and in the heat of the moment a parang (native sword) is easily drawn and some wound inflicted which may be followed by a mortal combat. In such a way do feuds arise between one group and another. Others may arise by reason of high handed methods in bargaining or refusal to pay debts real or imaginary. Feuds once started may be carried on until one group is completely wiped out. The head-hunting of the Muruts is done in the pursuit of such feuds.

The Murut is ready to take a head of any kind, man, woman or child. The Dyak prefers a man's head taken in open daylight personal combat. The Murut will steal upon his foe by night and put the muzzle of his musket as close to the body of the victim as possible, shoot, and

then fly like the wind regardless of thorns or brambles tearing his legs. Or, if the parang is the weapon used, he will approach at dead of night and strike the victim while asleep. The only window in the Murut house is a narrow strip about six inches high at the base of the shallow wall between roof and floor. As soon as approaching darkness makes it necessary to light a torch of resin this window is closed by lowering a plank across it. This prevents the enemy from poking his gun through the opening or blowing poison darts through it.

After taking heads a series of festivities are carried on for a month. Long poles are erected outside the house, one for each head, and these are decorated with long strips of wood shaving. The Muruts do not care to exhibit their festivities to the observation of the white man, but one of them witnessed by the writer was a dance performed by all members of the house marching closely one behind the other, all stepping forward with the same leg together, with hands on the shoulders of the one in front. The leader moves about in a snake-like path, followed by the whole column, which winds back and forth across the wide corridor part of the house, chanting meanwhile a peculiarly doleful tune. This may be kept up indefinitely.

The wealth of the Murut is measured by so many pigs or so many jars. The jars are about four feet high and two feet in maximum diameter, with a mouth about six inches across. These jars are of Chinese manufacture and are gaudily colored and patterned and very well made and glazed. They are used for funeral purposes, so several members of a wealthy Murut's family may be interred in jars. The jar is split about the middle and the body placed in it in a doubled up posture. The break and the mouth of the jar are sealed with clay. A hole is made in the base and a bamboo tube is inserted and sealed with clay. The bamboo leads to the ground and serves as a carrier of liquids to the earth. After being closed up in this way the jar is placed in a small hut erected some distance away from the house and offerings are placed in front of it from time to time.

Purely native art includes the making of clay pots for cooking rice, simple or slightly ornamented; the weaving

of bark fibre coats; the carving of bamboo pipes and bamboo carry-alls which serve the coatless Murut for pockets. Pigments used are few. A vegetable black dye is used, and brown and red ochres are obtained from limonite and hematite. A much brighter waxy red coloring stain is used on the bamboo surfaces. It is obtained from the crushed seed pod of the rotan cane which is a creeper. This creeper attains a thickness of stem of half an inch. The outer part is cut off in narrow strips and is utilized by the white man for cane-bottomed chairs. The native of Borneo finds a multitude of uses for this strong, durable and pliable material. A hut built without nails will be securely lashed together at all joints with this material.

In the interior of Trusan district is a group of Muruts two hundred strong who practice a type of irrigation on the drained floor of a former lake. They have the notion that theirs is the largest and most thickly populated community on the earth.